

# Vicksburg National Military Park

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

Vicksburg National Military Park



## Windsor Plantation



### The Stately Columns Are All That Remain...

Through the decades, thousands have driven a winding road from Port Gibson, Mississippi, to see the stately columns which are all that remain of Windsor, one of the most magnificent homes in the antebellum South.



*Windsor as depicted by Union officer, Henry Otis Dwight, 20<sup>th</sup> Ohio Infantry.*

How it actually appeared before being destroyed by fire in 1890 was a mystery (and possibly part of its attraction), until a drawing was discovered in the diary of a Civil War officer, showing the Claiborne County home in its heyday.

The diary and drawing belonged to Henry Otis Dwight, a Union officer who served with the 20<sup>th</sup> Ohio Infantry during the Civil War and was discovered in the Ohio State Archives in Columbus, OH.

Though other artists have sketched pictures of the house, they were

done from oral descriptions. Dwight's drawing is the first found that was done by someone who actually saw the home. The sketch bears the words, "*May 1<sup>st</sup> 1863. Residence Near Bruinsburg Miss.*", in what is believed to be Dwight's own handwriting.

It is thought that Dwight and other soldiers passed Windsor on their way to fight in Port Gibson in May 1863. The site is near the former town of Bruinsburg, where Maj. Gen. U.S. Grant's Army crossed the Mississippi River in his quest to take Vicksburg.

### The Largest Antebellum House in Mississippi



*Artist rendering of Windsor Plantation*

Windsor, built between 1859 and 1861, was the home of Smith Coffee Daniell, II, a wealthy planter who had extensive properties in the Delta and in Arkansas. Completed in 1861, the home was the largest house built at that time, the plantation once covering over 2,600 acres. From the elaborate furnishings to the wrought iron staircase, the four-story home was designed to reflect the height of Southern life at the time.

Construction costs totaled \$175,000 (not a small sum for that era), which included the building cost and its furnishings. Tanks in the attic supplied water for the interior baths. The mansion contained twenty-five rooms with twenty-five fireplaces, with a basement containing a school room, dairy, and supply rooms. Unfortunately, Smith Daniell only lived in the large mansion for a few weeks before he died.

## Overlooking the Mississippi River



The house was topped by a roof observatory, where Confederate troops watching the river used signal equipment to alert Confederate troops of Yankee advances, and a Yankee soldier was shot in the front doorway of the home. Given that the mansion was used as a Union hospital and observation post during the war, this is most likely why it was spared from being burned by the Union troops at the time.

After the war, Mark Twain used to stand in the rooftop observatory and muse while overlooking the Mississippi River in the distance, comparing Windsor to a college instead of a residence, due to its size. The plantation became a prominent landmark along the Mississippi River, and Twain wrote of its elegance in his book *"Life on the Mississippi."*

## A Party Guest Who Carelessly Dropped a Cigarette...



The home survived the war only to be totally destroyed on February 17, 1890, by a fire said to have been caused by a party guest who carelessly dropped a cigarette. Descendants of the Daniells say the fire started about 3 o'clock in the afternoon. The family was making plans for a seated dinner, but had gone to pick up the mail. Riding back to the house, they saw flames shooting from the shingled roof. The fire burned Windsor from the top down, making the conflagration impossible to put out.

Today, all that remains of Windsor are 23 Corinthian columns on the site. The family's descendants gave the ruins to the State Department of Archives in 1974 and the State has maintained the site since. The wrought iron staircase is now a part of nearby Alcorn State University. Windsor Ruins has appeared in several feature films, including *Raintree County* (1957), which starred Elizabeth Taylor and Montgomery Cliff.

## Visit the Ruins

Windsor Ruins are located 12 miles from Port Gibson on Mississippi Highway 552.

